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Ambeth R. Ocampo

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Thus the late President Sukarno of Indonesia, an anti-colonial leader, in a public speech while
 iving an honorary degree, and viewing Europe and its history through an inverted telescope, as
 eans often regard other parts of the globe. Strange shifts in perspective can take place when Berlin
 ewed from Jakarta, or when the complex histories of colonial domination strand what counts as the
 iving work of a national culture in a language its people can no longer read. The 'Spectre of
 ularisms' arises as nations stir into self awareness, matching themselves against others, and
 iving whole through the exercise of the imagination.

In this series of profound and eloquent essays, Benedict Anderson, best known for his classic book on
 ism, *Imagined Communities*, explores these effects as they work their way through politics and
 ure. Spanning broad accounts of the development of nationalism and identity, and detailed studies of
 East Asia, the book includes pieces on East Timor, where every Indonesian attempt to suppress
 ional feeling has had the opposite effect; on the Philippines, where it is said that some horses eat better
 some stable hands; on Thailand, where so much money can be made in elected posts that candidates
 ily kill to get them; on the Filipino nationalist and novelist José Rizal for whom 'we mortals are
 urtles—we have value and are classified according to our shells'; and a remarkable essay on Mario
 as Iloilo, detailing the fate of indigenous minorities at the hands of the modern state.

While *The Spectre of Comparisons* is an indispensable resource for those interested in Southeast Asia,
 erson also takes up the large issues of the universal grammars of nationalism and ethnicity, the
 ularity of nationalist imagery as replicas without originals, and the mutations of nationalism in an
 of mass global migrations and instant electronic communications.

Benedict Anderson is Aaron L. Binenkorb Professor of
 ernational Studies at Cornell University. He is the author
Java in a Time of Revolution, Language and Power:
During Political Cultures in Indonesia and Imagined
Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of
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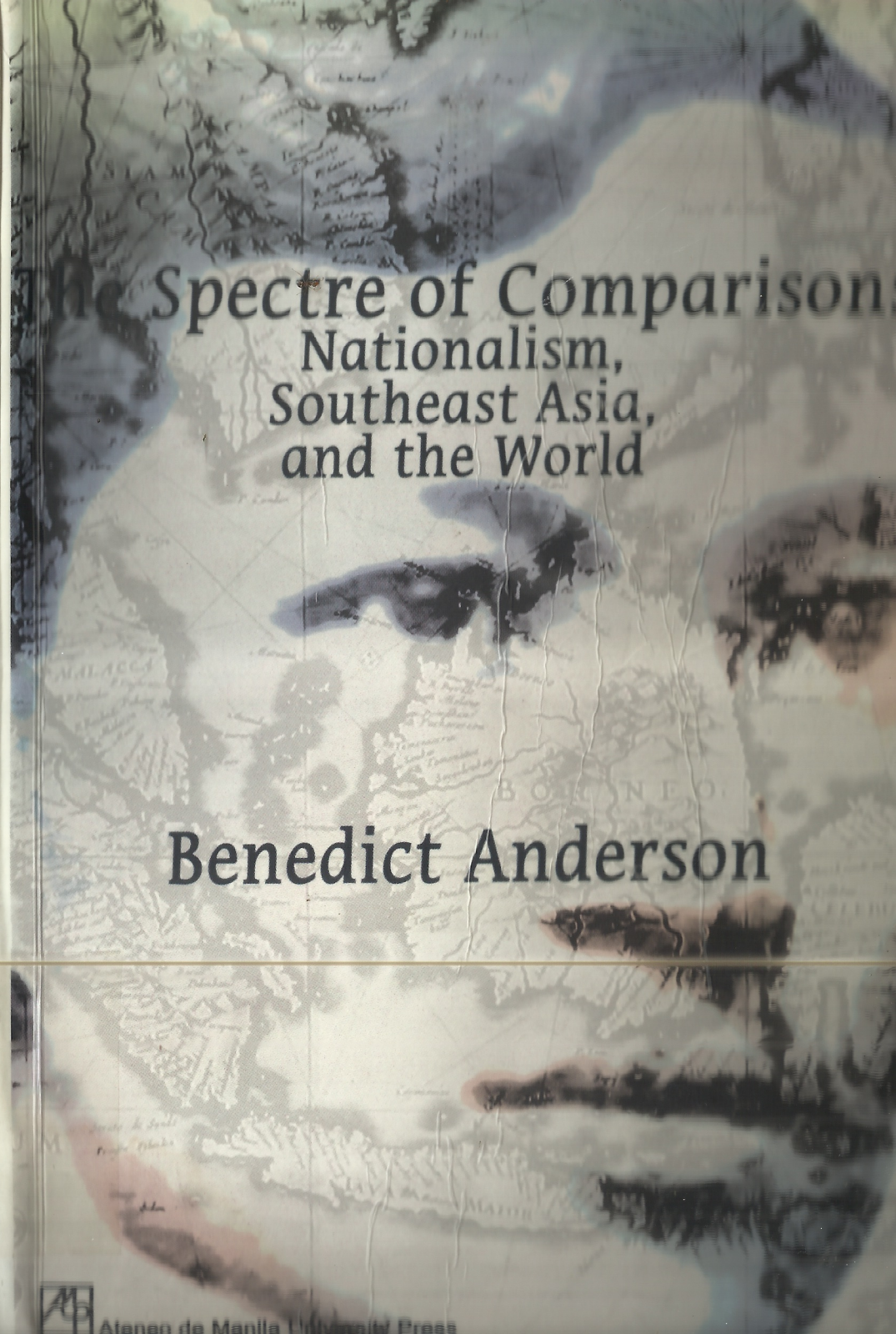


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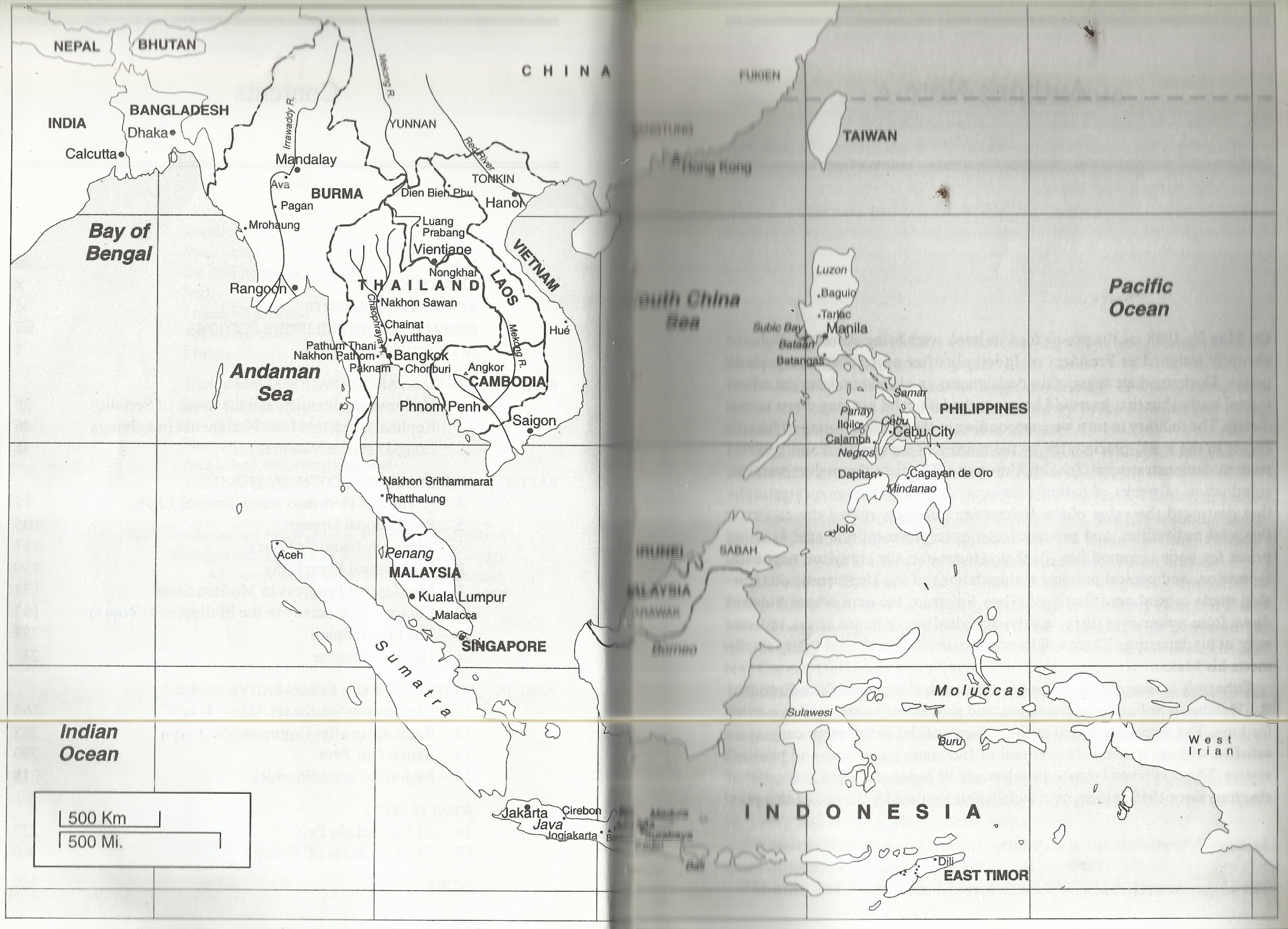
Svetit vseгда,
 Svetit vezde,
 Do dnei poslednikh dontsa,
 Svetit—
 I nikakikh gvozdei!
 Vot lozung moi—
 I solntsa!

Shine always,
 Shine everywhere,
 To the depths of the last days,
 Shine—
 And to hell with everything else!
 That's my motto—
 And the sun's!

V. Mayakovsky, "Neobychainoe Priklyuchenie, Byvshee s Vladimirom
 Mayakovskim Letom na Dache" (An Extraordinary
 Adventure which Befell Vladimir Mayakovsky
 in a Summer Cottage), 1920

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Author's Note

On May 21, 1998, as the proofs for this book were being corrected, Suharto abruptly resigned as President of Indonesia after over thirty-two years in power. The immediate cause of his decision was an ultimatum from the armed forces' leadership that he would be impeached if he did not step down immediately. The military in turn were responding to the massive rioting in Jakarta earlier in the week, precipitated by the murder of six unarmed and peaceful student demonstrators at Trisakti University. The riots themselves were the culmination of weeks of nation-wide protests at the economic catastrophe that destroyed the value of the Indonesian currency, ruined the country's financial institutions, and produced vast unemployment and steeply rising prices for basic commodities. To that catastrophe, the cronyism, nepotism, repression, and cynical political manipulations of the kleptocratic dictatorship made central contributions. When Sukarno, the man whom Suharto drove from power over three decades ago, died under house arrest, millions wept at his departure. There will be only dry eyes when the old tyrant finally meets his Maker.

Suharto's successor, the Buginese aeronautical engineer, Vice-President B.J. Habibie, is Suharto's own creation, and should not be expected to survive for long. The forces unleashed in the collapse of the dictatorship can not be satisfied without a complete overhaul of Indonesia's economy and political system. The first crucial step to be taken will be Indonesia's first free national elections since 1955, which, with luck, will take place by the end of this year.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the publishers of the following books and journals for their kind permission to reproduce the texts listed below.

"Nationalism, Identity, and the Logic of Seriality" is closely based on a text of the same title in *Cosmopolitics*, edited by Bruce Robbins and Pheng Cheah (University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

"Replica, Aura, and Late Nationalist Imaginings" is adapted from an article that first appeared in *Qui Parle*, 7: 1 (Fall/Winter 1993).

"Long-Distance Nationalism" is a hybrid of two texts. The first appeared as "Exodus" in *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (Winter 1994), and the second, "Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics," was issued by the University of Amsterdam Centre for Asian Studies.

"A Time of Darkness and a Time of Light" originally appeared in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, edited by Anthony Reid and David Marr (Hong Kong: Heinemann, 1979); it was reprinted with permission in my *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

"Professional Dreams" is based on a paper presented in 1984 to the Southeast Asian Summer Studies Institute and first published in my *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

"Gravel in Jakarta's Shoes," "The First Filipino," and "Sauve Qui Peut" first appeared in *London Review of Books*, 17: 21 (Nov. 2, 1995), 19: 20 (Oct. 16, 1997), and 20: 8 (April 16, 1998), respectively.

"Withdrawal Symptoms" was first published in the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 9: 3 (July–Sept. 1977).

"Murder and Progress in Modern Siam," "Cacique Democracy in the

Philippines," and "Radicalism after Communism" were first published in *New Left Review*, nos. 181 (May–June 1990), 169 (May–June 1988), and 202 (Nov.–Dec. 1993), respectively.

"Elections in Southeast Asia" first appeared in *The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia*, edited by Robert Taylor, published jointly by the Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1996.

"Majorities and Minorities" is a version of my introduction to *Southeast Asian Tribal Groups and Ethnic Minorities*, edited by Jason Clay (Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, 1987).

"The Goodness of Nations" is a version of an essay that will appear in *Religion and Nationalism*, edited by Peter van der Veer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Preface to the Philippine Edition

Most Filipinos who read Jose Rizal's *Noli me tangere* these days read it in translation (either English or Pilipino) and thus lose many details and nuances that abound in the Spanish original. Worse, since Rizal is part of the high school and college curriculum, his works have spawned what is best described as a Rizal industry—biographies, compilations, commentaries—predominantly textbook material that continually dilutes the beauty and message of Rizal's novels and poetry. Rizal is seldom read for pleasure today; rather, his novels are read as an academic requirement, his texts mined for patriotic symbols and sentiment, his words memorized for examinations, quiz bees, and oratorical contests. Would Rizal be fossilized as such if he did not happen to be prime National Hero of the Philippines? One can imagine that if Rizal's works were not required and canonized texts many interested Filipinos would be spared the corrupted translations, censored versions, and comic-book versions that now form part of the thriving Rizal industry. Given the above situation it is easy to miss the detail in chapter 8 of the *Noli me tangere* that provided the title to this collection of essays on nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the world by Benedict Anderson.

In the chapter entitled "Recuerdos" (Memories-Souvenirs), Crisostomo Ibarra goes around Manila in a carriage, immersed in reflection. He sees the familiar sights, sounds, and even smells of Manila in the 1880s, and all this sensory input results in a flood of childhood memories as well as reminiscences of the places he had visited while studying in Europe. His mind and memory were working overtime, moving forward and backward, in an exercise in comparison and contrast. While looking at the Manila Botanical Garden he recalls the well-kept botanical gardens of Europe, and here

appears the term "*El demonio de las comparaciones*" rendered into English by Anderson as "The Spectre of Comparisons."

The title for this book is quite apt since what Rizal was doing in the late 1880s, Anderson was also doing a century later in the 1990s. Not content with library or archival research, Anderson—as he did in Indonesia and Thailand—immersed himself in everyday Philippine life in order to understand the country and its people afresh. He not only learned Spanish by reading Rizal in the original, he learned colloquial Filipino by watching films: from the thought-provoking works of Mike de Leon to the protest films of Lino Brocka, even the box-office hits of Sharon Cuneta, Robin Padilla, and what were then known as "ST films." He realized early on that Philippine newspapers drew their readership from opinion columns rather than the news and thus read voraciously even the comic strip *Pugad Baboy*. Furthermore, Anderson did not confine himself to academic circles, but conversed with ordinary folk, traveled around the country in a beat-up second-hand car, and even tried his hand at Filipino crosswords in racy tabloids. He found himself near Camp Aguinaldo and even Camelot Hotel during the most serious coup attempt against the Aquino government. From all these readings and experiences, Anderson drew his own demon of comparisons.

When he requested to sit in my undergraduate Rizal at the University of the Philippines in 1989, my immediate reaction was to refuse, but in typical Pinoy fashion, I said yes when I actually meant no. I even remember misleading him by giving him the wrong class schedule, but when he turned up outside my classroom one fateful Saturday afternoon I was left with no choice but to admit him. Anderson sat quietly in the back, but the effect on the students was electric. This was a course on Rizal whose title happened to be Philippine Institutions 100. Naturally, bored students forced to take P.I. 100 referred to the course number in a coarse but more colorful way. The students were either too shy or too Pinoy to stare at the quiet man in the back, but later some of them came up to me and asked, "Why is the foreigner interested in Rizal?" None of the students knew or cared that this was the author of the often-quoted book, *Imagined Communities*. Yet his presence made them sit up and take Rizal a bit more seriously than they previously did. If a foreigner was willing to waste his Saturday afternoon in this class, there must be something more to Rizal than meets the eye.

In retrospect I wish Anderson had asked questions in class, the questions that have kept me and my students thinking and guessing for the past fourteen years. For example, Anderson asked, "Did Rizal use underwear?" Another time he asked, "Do you think Andres Bonifacio dreamed in color?" Or "what do you think is Imelda Marcos's idea of tacky?" These questions

seemed absurd at the outset but were merely the beginnings of a long research trail that did not always lead to concrete answers. But then for Anderson and his readers, the journey often proves more fruitful or eventful than the final destination. Those who have never met Anderson in person and have been spared his probing questions can get the same effect from the engaging and eloquent essays in this book which, very much like his difficult questions, are reflections on nationalism and Southeast Asia that always provide a fresh starting point for further inquiry, further comparison and contrast. This is the curse of "*el demonio de las comparaciones*."

Rizal makes an appearance in the landmark work, *Imagined Communities*, but it is in *Spectre of Comparisons* that he becomes more prominent. The cover of the first edition even has the photograph of Rizal's execution in 1896. It is thus appropriate and laudable that a Philippine edition of this work is now made available for the people and country for whom Anderson, like Rizal, writes with much wit, depth, and affection.

Ambeth R. Ocampo
Chair, National Historical Institute
January 2004

Introduction

THE SPECTRE OF COMPARISONS

On February 2, 1963, about a year after my initial encounter with what I had been trained to imagine as "Southeast Asia," I had a strange experience to which at that time I could not give a name. The then President of Indonesia, Sukarno, was to receive an honorary degree from the University of Indonesia, and he had invited the *corps diplomatique* to join the students and faculty for the occasion. Somehow I ended up as whispering interpreter for an elderly European diplomat. Sukarno was speaking about two of his favourite topics: nationalism and leadership. All went pleasantly until, out of the blue, he began to talk about Adolf Hitler, and in a strange manner—not as mass murderer, not even as a fascist and anti-Semite, but as a nationalist. Still more strangely for the two of us, the President, surely suspecting that few of the students had ever heard of Hitler, attempted to give the distant spectre of the *Führer* some local life by ventriloquizing in his own inimitable style of public speaking:¹

Take Hitler, for example—wah, Hitler was extraordinarily clever really—perhaps he wanted to say that happiness isn't possible on a material basis alone, and thus he pronounced another ideal, the ideal he called the Dritte Reich, the Third Kingdom. This Third Reich would really and truly bring happiness to the people of Germany. The First Kingdom was that of der alte Fritz, a kingdom led by Old

1. The official printed version of this speech is Soekarno [Sukarno], *Ilmu Pengetahuan Sekadar Alat Mentjapai Sesuatu* [Scientific Knowledge as an Instrument for Achieving Something] (Jakarta: Departemen Penerangan Republik Indonesia, Penerbitan Khusus no. 253, 1963). Further quotations from the speech, some analysis of its themes, and a comparison with the rhetoric of Charles de Gaulle, are given in chapter 2 ("Further Adventures of Charisma") of my *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

Fritz; the Second Kingdom was what existed just before the World War, and now this kingdom had been destroyed in the World War. "Come, let us build a Third Kingdom, a Dritte Reich, and in this Third Reich, hey, sisters, you will live happily; hey, brothers, you will live happily; hey, kids, you will live happily; hey, you German patriots, you will see Germany sitting enthroned above all peoples in this world." How clever Hitler was, brothers and sisters, in depicting these ideals!

As I whispered along, the elderly diplomat became increasingly agitated and incredulous. "Are you sure that's really what he's saying?" he asked me over and over. I had often heard Sukarno speak in this ventriloquizing style about Sun Yat-sen, Kemal Atatürk, Gandhi, De Valera, and Ho Chi Minh when he wanted to remind his fellow-countrymen that nationalism was a universal, and inseparable from internationalism. I tried, without success, to explain this to the diplomat, who stormed back to his embassy surer than ever that Sukarno was a demented and dangerous mountebank.

For myself, I felt a kind of vertigo. For the first time in my young life I had been invited to see my Europe as through an inverted telescope. Sukarno regarded himself as a man of the Left, and he was perfectly aware of the horrors of Hitler's rule. But he seemed to regard these horrors with the kind of calm with which a devout Christian contemplates the centuries of massacres and tortures committed in His Name—or perhaps with the brisk distance from which my schoolteachers had spoken of Genghiz Khan, the Inquisition, Nero, or Pizarro. It was going to be difficult from now on to think of "my" Hitler in the old way.

I did not find a good name for this experience till almost a quarter of a century later, when I was in the Philippines and teaching myself to read Spanish by stumbling through José Rizal's extraordinary nationalist novel *Noli Me Tangere*. There is a dizzying moment early in the narrative when the young mestizo hero, recently returned to the colonial Manila of the 1880s from a long sojourn in Europe, looks out of his carriage window at the municipal botanical gardens, and finds that he too is, so to speak, at the end of an inverted telescope. These gardens are shadowed automatically—Rizal says *maquinalmente*—and inescapably by images of their sister gardens in Europe. He can no longer matter-of-factly experience them, but sees them simultaneously close up and from afar. The novelist arrestingly names the agent of this incurable doubled vision *el demonio de las comparaciones*.² So that's what it was in 1963, I said to myself: the spectre of comparisons.

2. This moment occurs in chapter 8 ("Recuerdos"). See José Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere* (Manila: Instituto Nacional de Historia, 1978; offset from the original Berlin edition of 1887), p. 43. A fairly good new English translation of the novel, under the same title, came out from the University of Hawaii Press in 1997.

For me, "Southeast Asia" has been an exceptionally good *locus* from which to try to get accustomed to this kind of haunting. As a meaningful imaginary, it has had a very short life, shorter than my own. Not surprisingly, its naming came from outside, and even today very few among the almost 500 million souls inhabiting its roughly 1,750,000 square miles of land (to say nothing of water), ever think of themselves as "Southeast Asians." The older Chinese concept *nan-yang* referred vaguely to a "southern" region to be reached by sea.³ Its later Japanese derivation, *nampō*, stretched out broadly and elastically into what the Americans would call the Southwest Pacific. Southeast Asia, as such, emerged as a significant *political* term only in the summer of 1943 with the creation of Louis Mountbatten's South-East Asia Command, an offshoot of the more traditional India Command. But this command was based in Kandy, and its territorial responsibilities included both Ceylon and the Raj's Northeast Frontier (neither in "Southeast Asia" today) and excluded the Netherlands Indies (till July 1945), as well as the Philippines. Yet the naming clearly was a response to the fact that for the first time in history a single power—that of Hirohito's armies—effectively controlled the entire stretch between British Burma and the Hispano-American Philippines.⁴

It was at almost exactly the same time that academics began to use the term seriously, above all those from the two Anglo-Saxon maritime imperial states.⁵

3. The term literally means "southern foreign" and is an antonym to *pei-yang*, or "northern foreign." But the word *yang* includes a radical for water, so that both terms were used for places Peking associated with the sea. It is a matter of curiosity that *pei-yang* was used to denote, not merely the Liao-ning and Shantung peninsulas but even Chih-li, the coastal province in which the imperial capital was itself located. (Hence in the 1920s, the warlords operating out of Peking were called the Peiyang Clique.) The vast areas to the north of the Great Wall were never referred to in this way. Similarly, *nan-yang* was used both for the coastal provinces of southeast China, especially Kwangtung and Fukien, and for the Malay archipelago (today's Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines), but not for land-accessible Burma or Laos. (My thanks to Vivienne Shue for illumination on this point.)

4. British Burma, Malaya, and Singapore, the American Philippines, and the Dutch Indies all fell to direct military assault. Because Vichy was an ally of the Axis powers, the Japanese did not get rid of the French till March 1945. But they maintained a dominating presence, as an "ally," before that, and the colonial Vichy regime had to do their bidding. In Siam, the shrewd military dictator Phibunsongkhram, to avoid the worst, had allied himself with Tokyo early on, but he still had to permit Japanese armies to march through his country, and to submit to their demands in other ways.

5. The formidable exception is perhaps the *magnum opus* of the French colonial-era scholar Georges Coedès, *Les États hindouisés d'Indochine et d'Indonésie* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1948). In this grand comparative study of the Sanskritized states in pre-fifteenth-century "Southeast Asia," "Indochine" and "Indonésie" are merely shorthand geographical denotations—but enough to indicate that Burma and the Philippines are not within its purview. When this book was finally published in English translation twenty years later, American Cold War anachronizing had turned the title into *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*.

The new wave can be said to have begun in 1941, when the great Burma scholar and former British colonial civil servant John Furnivall published—in New York—his *Welfare and Progress in South-East Asia*, followed two years later—again in New York—by his *Educational Progress in Southeast Asia*. In 1942 the American political scientist Rupert Emerson, with his colleagues Lennox Mills and Virginia Thompson, issued *Government and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*. The left-wing American Bruno Lasker published *Peoples of Southeast Asia* in 1944 and the splendid *Human Bondage in Southeast Asia* in 1950. British colonial civil servant Victor Purcell produced in 1951 a nervous *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*. The following year, the British historian Quaritch Wales anachronized “Southeast Asia” centuries into the pre-European past in his *Ancient South-East Asian Warfare*. With the appearance of former British colonial civil servant D.G.E. Hall’s magisterial *A History of South-East Asia* in 1955, the concept was grandly normalized (though Hall did not include the Philippines in the first edition of the work, this absence was partly made up for in successive later editions).

Why so late? And why the final rush? To begin with, there was the absence of a historic hegemonic power like the Ottomans for the Near or Middle East, the Habsburgs and Bourbons for “Latin” America, the Mughals for “India,” and the successive dynasts of Peking who made “China” a plausible bounded mirage. Next was the extraordinary religious heterogeneity of the region once Islam (from the thirteenth century) and Christianity (from the sixteenth) broke up a Hindu-Buddhist syncretic civilization whose residues are still among the world’s wonders—Angkor in Cambodia, Borobudur in Java, Ayutthaya in Siam, and Pagan and Mrohaung in Burma.⁶ Today, Burma, Siam, Laos, and Cambodia are variously Buddhist, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei predominantly Muslim, and the Philippines mainly Catholic, while Vietnam has inherited chiefly from Confucianism, Taoism, and Mahayana Buddhism. But there is no doubt that the central factor was the strange history of mottled imperialism in the region.⁷ Only the Belgians and Italians were missing. The British in Burma, Malaya, Singapore, and northern Borneo, the Dutch in the Indies, Portugal in eastern Timor, the Spaniards and Americans in the Philippines, and the French in Laos,

Cambodia, and Vietnam; plus the buffer-state of quasi-independent Siam, surviving on sufferance between the colonies of rival London and Paris. Furthermore, mottled imperialism came not in a late nineteenth-century rush, as happened to most of Africa, but stretched across the centuries: the Portuguese and Spaniards arrived in the late feudal sixteenth century, the Dutch in the mercantilist seventeenth, the British in the enlightened eighteenth, the French in the industrial nineteenth, and the Americans in the motorized twentieth. Each imperial power, jealous of, and rivalrous with, its competitors, worked to close off its possessions from the rest, so that at the beginning of this century young educated people in Batavia (Jakarta) knew more about Amsterdam than they did about a Cambodia with which their ultimate ancestors had once had close ties, while their cousins in Manila knew more about Madrid and New York than about the Vietnamese littoral a short step across the South China Sea. Furthermore, these colonies were, even in the age of the aeroplane, the telegraph, and the telephone, the most remote of all. Vietnam was farther from Paris, the Philippines from either Madrid or Washington, East Timor from Lisbon, and Malaya from London (with the exception of mottled Australia and New Zealand) than any other of their domains. Remote, heterogeneous, and, so to speak, imperially segmented, it is not so very surprising that the region was late in its unitary naming.

Yet by the beginning of this century the terrain was becoming bordered for the first time, not least thanks to the heritage of Mercator.⁸ What is today’s Burma was, between 1885 and 1937, an integral part of colonial India—its only Buddhist province. But in that time it was given continuous, mapped borders which it largely retains to this day. Paris marked clearly out where China ended and Franco-Vietnamese Tonkin began, erasing centuries of osmotic interconnections, not to speak of a millennium of incorporation of parts of today’s Vietnam into the Middle Kingdom.⁹ At the beginning of this century the half of New Guinea lying west of longitude 141 was included in the Netherlands Indies and is today part of Southeast Asia. The eastern half, however, is not. The northern half of this half was, between 1885 and the Great War, Kaiser Wilhelm’s land and attached to the no less ludicrously named Bismarck Archipelago as a German colony. The southern half was British. After 1920 both passed by stages into a fragile unit controlled by

6. To avoid misunderstanding: Hinduism and tantric Mahayana Buddhism came to some parts of Southeast Asia very early in the Christian era, and were the bases of court cults at least from the fourth century. But one can be certain that for many centuries most of the populations were animist. Hindu and Buddhist cults could compete or intermix without intractable conflicts. Major change did not come till the end of the twelfth century, when a more austere form of Buddhism (Hinayana or Theravada), brought from Ceylon, pushed its predecessors more and more aside.

7. Mottled—“marked by an irregular arrangement of patches of colour”—seems more visually precise and less morally dubious than either “white” or “Caucasian.”

8. Already the *locus classicus* on the cartographic revolution is Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

9. From the second half of the first century AD until the middle of the tenth. The standard work is Keith Welker Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

Australian secondary imperialism. One can see the real importance of the map if one considers not only Papua-New Guinea's exclusion from Southeast Asia, but also the quite recent decision of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to reject the application of Ceylon/Sri Lanka for admission. Ceylon has cultural, mercantile, and even political associations with Southeast Asia going back a millennium, and it shares Theravada Buddhism with Burma, Siam, Cambodia, and Laos (two-way pilgrimages continue today across the Bay of Bengal as they have for centuries). Its agriculture, climate, food, and culture have strong resemblances to those in significant parts of Southeast Asia. But it has ended up, uncomfortably perhaps, in "South Asia."

The rush came from the Pacific War, rapid postwar decolonization, the onset of the Cold War, and a sustained American attempt to replace the Japanese as the single regional hegemon. The abrupt and humiliating collapse of all the mottled imperialisms in the region between early 1942 and 1945, the arming and military training of "natives" by an increasingly desperate Japan from 1943, the rise of anti-Japanese guerrilla groups sometimes assisted by the Allies from afar, and the traumatic battles fought between Japanese and Allies in Burma and the Philippines, all meant that after Japan's capitulation in August 1945, the Europeans could not make an effective comeback. Nothing like this happened anywhere else in the colonized zones of Asia and Africa. It also meant that Southeast Asia was the one colonized region—after Spanish America 140 or so years earlier—where armed struggle for independence—and more—was commonplace. Curiously enough, the process had started in 1896 in that westernmost part of Latin America, the Philippines, when an early (for Asia) and late (for Latin America) uprising led by Andrés Bonifacio, Emilio Aguinaldo, and Apolinario Mabini created a free Philippine Republic in 1898—though it was soon crushed by the United States. Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, even in a certain way Malaya, actually fought, mostly with bitter success, for their independence—and were increasingly aware of each other doing so. Already in early 1947 the progressive civilian Prime Minister of Siam, Pridi Phanomyong, in the brief period before he was overthrown by the military, launched an abortive Southeast Asian League, to build regional networks of mutual help against imperialism.¹⁰

It was, however, the opening of the Cold War in Asia that really began the long process of making Southeast Asia the kind of imagined reality it is

today. Seen from the United States, the major states of Big Asia had a more or less settled position. Japan had been occupied by the Americans, and was firmly subordinated to Washington's military and economic machinery. India, after the crisis of Partition, appeared stably quasi-British under the uncontested hegemony of Nehru and the Congress Party. China, alas, after 1949, was "lost" to communism, but it was too huge to warrant more than hit-and-run, semi-clandestine interventions. The new states of the zone between India-Pakistan and China were another matter. In almost all of them, indigenously created, and typically armed, communist-led movements contested the legitimacy of the postwar order that the Allies had attempted to create. In Burma, in 1949, a year after formal independence was achieved, two competing communist parties, along with assorted ethnic rebel groups, left U Nu's government in control of little more than Rangoon. In the French colonies to the east, the First Indochina War had broken out late in 1946, a year after Ho Chi Minh had declared Vietnam's independence. As this war lurched towards its end at Dien Bien Phu, communist movements spread across the hill country of Laos, and, a good bit later, into Sihanouk's Cambodia. In the Philippines, the American reimposition of a corrupt cacique order to lead the country after the formalization of independence (on, of course, the Fourth of July, 1946), led to a major communist insurrection (1948 to about 1954) based on the Hukbalahap anti-Japanese guerrilla forces of the war years. In Indonesia, it initially appeared that the indigenous Left had been crushed in 1948 by forces loyal to revolutionary President Sukarno and Vice-President Hatta, but after the transfer of sovereignty, the Communist Party made an extraordinary (and legal) comeback, and within little more than a decade had become the largest communist party outside the communist bloc. In Malaya, which did not become formally independent till 1957, London found, after the spring of 1948, the longest and fiercest resistance it ever faced in the history of its modern empire—from a Malayan communist party which grew out of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army. Only in Siam did "normality" appear to prevail; armed communism only began to emerge in the mid-1960s.

No other region of the world—not Latin America, not the Near East, not Africa, and not South Asia—had this kind of alarming profile. The new hegemon was determined that it not be "lost" like China. Out of this, in 1954, came SEATO (the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization), formed in American Manila, and later headquartered in Bangkok, which was designed to save the whole postcolonial region from the communist spectre.¹¹ In the following

10. But there was no sense of a bloc. All groups sought alliances with progressive groups in the imperial metropolises. Indonesian revolutionaries built effective ties to Australia, Egypt, and Nehru's newly independent India. All the radically Left organizations hooked up to various degrees with the Soviet Union and (after 1949) the CPR.

11. A certain instability in Southeast Asia was still evident in SEATO's membership. Of the local states only Siam and the Philippines joined—their colleagues included the United States, Ukania, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, and Australia.

decade, two different attempts were made by local governments in Southeast Asia to create a regional organization less wholly dominated by outsiders; both proved abortive. ASA (Association of Southeast Asia), created in 1961 by Siam, the Philippines, and what was still Malaya, proved incapable of solving the growing quarrel created by Manila's claim to North Borneo (Sabah).¹² Maphilindo, a 1963 inspiration of Indonesia's radical-populist president Sukarno—meant to include the “Malay” nations of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines—quickly foundered when Whitehall cobbled together “Malaysia” out of Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo, and the once-fabled Sarawak of the White Rajahs.¹³ Only in 1967, after Sukarno had been driven from power in an orgy of mass murder, was a more permanent institution created: that Association of Southeast Asian Nations which recently—after a thirty-year interval—admitted Vietnam, Burma, and Laos, and will probably incorporate Hun Sen's Cambodia and Xanana Gusmão's East Timor one day.¹⁴

SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES, SOUTHEAST ASIANS, SOUTHEAST ASIANISTS

In a quite different sphere from that of diplomats, generals, intelligence services, and heads of state, Southeast Asia was becoming, earlier and with more success, a kind of reality. Just as heterogeneous colonialisms had produced substantial bodies of scholarship framed by each colony for itself—in the English language for Burma and Malaya, in American for the Philippines, in Dutch for the Indies/Indonesia, and in French for Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, so post-war American anticommunist hegemony created the initial bases for the new field of Southeast Asian studies. The first academic programme to pursue such studies was set up at Yale University in 1947, followed shortly thereafter by a sister programme at my own university, Cornell. In the condition of alarm created by the launching of Sputnik in October 1957, and with the onset of the Second Indochina War, comparable programmes multiplied across the United States. Subsequently, the format spread, with differing emphases, to Australia, Japan, Ukania, France, Canada, Germany, Scandinavia, and so forth.

12. This remote and sparsely populated terrain was run by the North Borneo Company from the end of the nineteenth century until the Japanese military swept its commercial regime away. Whitehall took it over after the Pacific War ended.

13. Sukarno's fury at this move from London led eventually to a semi-armed confrontation between his government and Harold Wilson's residual empire in the East. Most of what fighting there was took place in Borneo, where Gurkha mercenaries performed perhaps their final combat mission.

14. In the interim—i.e. between the founding of SEATO and the creation of ASEAN—Siam had become the military, economic, and political hub of massive American interventions across the mainland states.

There was, from the start, a key difference between Southeast Asian studies, as pioneered in the United States, and the colonial-era scholarship that preceded it.¹⁵ Virtually all the great names of the colonial era—say, John Furnivall and Gordon Luce (Burma); Henri Maspéro and Paul Mus (Indochina); Richard Winstedt and R.J. Wilkinson (Malaya); Theodoor Pigeaud and Bertram Schrieke (the Netherlands Indies); Roy Barton and Ralston Hayden (the Philippines)—were, or had been, colonial civil servants. They lived long periods of their lives in the colonies and knew them pretty well. The condition for this immersion, however, was that, even if they privately doubted the colonial enterprise, they could not say so publicly.¹⁶ In the postwar, postcolonial era, this kind of figure disappeared. Southeast Asia, or at least the non-communist parts of it, encountered hordes of American officials—dealing with everything from military and intelligence matters to education and capitalist development—but they were busy people who rarely understood local vernaculars, had little time or inclination for the leisured research that the colonial calm had made possible, and were rotated too rapidly to understand anything very deeply.

As a result, Southeast Asian studies came to be the province of a metropolitan professoriat, who were financial beneficiaries not primarily of the American national state, but rather of private and state universities as well as private foundations (in particular the Ford and Rockefeller foundations). Since the framing of their work—Southeast Asia—was the consequence of decolonization and the attempted American Cold War hegemony in the region, their studies were heavily concentrated in disciplinary fields quite different from those of their colonial-era predecessors: political science above all, but also modern history and anthropology, as opposed to archaeology, ancient history, and classical literatures. This transformation meant that its leaders were not civil-servant-minded or bureaucratically beholden (a good many had active, public sympathies with non-communist anticolonial nationalism, and not a few were publicly critical of Washington's policies).¹⁷

15. This theme is substantially elaborated in my “The Changing Ecology of Southeast Asian Studies in the United States, 1950–1990,” in Charles Hirschman, Charles F. Keyes, and Karl Hutterer, eds., *Southeast Asian Studies in the Balance: Reflections from America* (Ann Arbor: The Association for Asian Studies, 1992), pp. 25–40.

16. Furnivall was a partial exception. He started to publish biting critiques of British colonialism in Burma as early as the 1930s, but only after he had resigned from the colonial civil service.

17. It should, however, be noted that many of the first generation of “Southeast Asianists” served in the American armed forces or were drawn from pre-war university circles into the Office of Strategic Services and the Office of Naval Intelligence during the Pacific War. A number stayed on as a progressive, anticolonial nucleus in the Department of State for a few years after the war, till the rise of McCarthyism drove them out. (The OSS, ancestor of the CIA, was founded in 1942 and disbanded in October 1945, whereupon its functions and functionaries were absorbed by the Departments of State and War. The CIA proper was not established until 1947.)

The creation of an institutionalized field of research called Southeast Asian studies, in the heart of a continental power with immense financial resources and huge political ambitions had, for present purposes, two critical consequences. First, professors and graduate students were clustered together, across disciplines, not by particular country interests but by region. The former gave, the latter took, classes in "Southeast Asian history," "Southeast Asian politics," "The economies of Southeast Asia," "Myth and symbol in Southeast Asia," and so forth.¹⁸ Such classes had the real advantage of forcing all students to think more or less comparatively across an extremely diverse "region," and to bring students together, cheek by jowl, even if one was interested in ancient Vietnam, another in Philippine public administration, and still another in Javanese mystical cults. (It also had the disadvantage of frequently segmenting these students from professors and students studying Korea, Sri Lanka, the Middle East, China, etc.) Intense student classroom and personal relationships eventually lengthened out into academic careers which were deeply bound up with and committed to Southeast Asia as a real place. This commitment also transcended immediate Cold War divisions in that, in principle, communist, neutralist, and pro-American countries were to be studied side by side within a single frame.¹⁹ In this sense, Southeast Asia was more real, in the 1950s and 1960s, to people in American universities than to anyone else. Second, America had in those days the resources to create "Southeast Asian" libraries which had no parallels anywhere in the world;²⁰ it also had the scholarship monies to bring over interested students from many different countries, of whom far

18. The format of such courses demanded the demonstration of unifying factors prior to the Cold War, and of a "deeper" kind than the political conflicts of those years. It was no means plain sailing: it is symptomatic that the standard (collective) history textbook for the region (originally published in 1971, in Kuala Lumpur, by Oxford University Press) is still, in its updated, revised form, plaintively called *In Search of Southeast Asia*. The most interesting "unifier" is certainly the wide prevalence of bilateral kinship-systems and uxorial residence patterns, both of which tend to give women a relatively good social position. There is here an obvious contrast with the patrilineal, virilocal systems predominant in China, Japan, and India, which strongly subordinate women. A less serious common element is the use along the littorals of Southeast Asia, but not to the north and west, of condiments made from fermented fish and molluscs which give the local cuisines a distinctive, kindred, flavour.

19. Compare the much harder line dividing the study of "Western" and "Eastern" Europe in the same Cold War period.

20. The most extraordinary example is the Echols Collection on Southeast Asia at Cornell University, which currently contains close to half a million printed volumes, microfilms, and microfiches in western languages and local vernaculars, as well as 23,000 serials—half as large again as the Library of Congress's holdings. In the same era, cash-strapped universities in European imperial centres tended, even where they nominally adopted a Southeast Asian format, to focus on their countries' former colonies and on the use of their already existing and voluminous colonial archives.

the most important were students from the accessible countries of Southeast Asia itself. The long years of student life, with their shared studies, cross-national friendships, love affairs and sometimes marriages, began already in the 1950s to create young people who could imagine themselves as Southeast Asians, as well as Indonesians or Filipinos or Siamese.²¹ When they returned home, often to important positions in national universities, national educational bureaucracies, and the higher-quality mass media, they often kept these personal connections alive for decades. Furthermore, a significant number of these students were enabled by study in America to publish their research (in the United States and elsewhere) in a single common language. For people of this kind, English became, without this being at all emphasized, the real lingua franca of Southeast Asia—in a way also a guarantor of its reality—long before this was true of diplomats, politicians, generals, and even technocrats.

In the second half of the 1960s, the deepening of the Vietnam War into the Second Indochina War, had as one side effect the further crystallization of Southeast Asia, in university communities and beyond. For the American mass media, Vietnam was almost invariably located in Southeast Asia—though given its centuries of irritable intimacy with China and its communist government in Hanoi, it should have been possible to see it as part of a Sinitic sphere of influence. As conscription started to bite, college enrolments in courses on Southeast Asia shot up; books on Southeast Asia were more and more available. What is more striking in retrospect is the number of professors and students who, without deep specialization on Vietnam or knowledge of the Vietnamese language, thought themselves morally bound, and intellectually able, to speak publicly about the country, and the war, with the authority of Southeast Asian studies.²² Still more interesting, the politicization and polarization of campus life caused by the war (which in fact deeply split the Southeast Asianists) had its effects on Southeast Asian students studying in America, and elsewhere outside their

21. Although most students coming from Southeast Asia quite naturally did their master's degree and doctoral research on their own countries, already in the late 1960s and early 1970s a few were working on other countries in the region—something virtually unthinkable before that era.

22. How surprisingly real this odd authority was struck me first when I realized that no one ever asked angrily what my citizenship (actually Irish) was, though my accent was distinctly un-American. A decade later, when I was summoned by a subcommittee of the US House of Representatives to testify on the subject of East Timor under Indonesian occupation, I experienced the same mild astonishment. I had never been to East Timor, I knew none of its languages, and had the haziest ideas about its history and politics: but that did not stop a veteran Southeast Asianist from feeling entitled to weigh in—nor did it stop the subcommittee from asking for my testimony in the first place!

own countries. It was possible to find Thai and Filipino students, whose governments were deeply complicit with the American war machine, protesting and marching against the war, and in solidarity with the peoples of Indochina.²³ Such students had, of course, their own national-political, as well as radical and humanitarian reasons for marching, but the crucial thing was that they recognized each other as fellow marchers, along with the American, European, Australian, and Canadian Southeast Asianist students who protested with them. Some of these students in the following decades became among the most serious and well-informed spokespersons for a genuinely democratized and inclusive ASEAN. They are the sort of people who in Bangkok urge the Thai government to give public support to Aung San Suu Kyi, and in Manila and Kuala Lumpur resist the Philippine and Malaysian governments' odious eagerness to appease the Suharto regime by suppressing conferences demanding the freedom of East Timor. Without much success, of course.

THE "CHINESE" AS SOUTHEAST ASIAN LABOURERS AND CAPITALISTS

When historians began—not so long ago—to imagine Southeast Asia as an ancient, pre-Cold War, precolonial reality, one key place for disinterring and viewing this reality was the enormous, centuries-old archive of the Middle Kingdom. From this kingdom, Buddhist pilgrims passed through littoral Southeast Asia on their way to and from holy shrines in today's South Asia, and some left detailed travel accounts. Until the Europeans put a stop to the practice, many of the more significant kingdoms in Southeast Asia were accustomed to sending missions to the incumbent Son of Heaven, for purposes of trade, intelligence, and political legitimacy; the imperial courts, which liked to think of these missions as "tributary," nonetheless used them to gather information on their "barbarous" southern periphery. (There are ironical parallels here between ancient Peking and contemporary Washington.) It is thus not by chance that the most distinguished contemporary historian of "ancient Southeast Asia," O.W. Wolters—whose *oeuvre* moves majestically across the terrain today occupied by Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia—started out as a young Sinologist

working for the absurdly misnamed "Chinese Protectorate" division of the colonial civil service in Malaya.²⁴

Typically evading the often ferocious imperial prohibitions against such movements, males from Fukien and Kwangtung, two southeast littoral provinces of today's China, emigrated to Southeast Asia from early times, marrying into local families, and working as artisans, traders, harbourmasters, and, in some cases, as powerful courtiers. Occasionally even higher: the current dynasty in Siam is, so to speak, 50 per cent of "Chinese" ancestry, and the Norodoms of Cambodia not much less. Most, on arrival, had no means, in an alien environment, to rear their mixed progeny as they themselves were reared. Barring unexpected external interventions, their descendants became absorbed into the local populations. This absorption was all the easier since the original migrants had no idea that they were "Chinese." They were overwhelmingly illiterate, and mostly spoke such mutually unintelligible languages as Hokkien and Cantonese; hence they identified themselves by occupation, clan, and home locality, not by a nationality which would emerge only centuries later.

Three fundamental forces worked to change this condition of gradual seepage and osmosis. The first was the arrival of the Europeans, who, understanding none of these languages, with their eyes glued on physiognomies, costumes, and occupations, and their ambitions set on controlling trade in the region, decided that all such people were "Chinese," and proceeded to act on the basis of this decision.²⁵ (Massacres of "Chinese" in Southeast Asia were initiated in the eighteenth century by the region's first racists: Dutchmen in Batavia/Jakarta and Spaniards in Manila.) Second was the great Tai-p'ing insurrection of the mid-nineteenth century which caused enormous devastation in southeast China, and cost the Ch'ing dynasty practically all control over its southern maritime borders. The near-simultaneous

24. There are paradoxes here. Wolters remains a deep admirer of Gerald Templar, the military proconsul who, with great difficulty, and at enormous cost to the resident "Chinese" communities—a quarter of a million of whom were forcibly sequestered in "New Villages"—broke the back of the communist insurgency in postwar Malaya. But since he became a scholar, he has resolutely, eueptically, confined his work to a Southeast Asia still uncontaminated by Europeans. A masterly, short demonstration of his views and his learning is his *History, Culture and Religion in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 1982).

25. Not at all exactly in the same vein. As I have noted elsewhere, the (barely Dutch) United East India Company used every means—sumptuary codes, residential sequestrations, imposed inheritance regulations, as well as collaborationist business elites—to insist on the Chineseness of people who spoke no "Chinese" language of any kind. In Las Islas Filipinas, such people were legally designated as "mestizos," with their own distinct tax obligations, residential possibilities, and so on. "Mestizo" always signalled, indirectly, alien. (See my "Recensement et politique en Asie du Sud-est," *Genèses*, 26 [April 1997], pp. 55–76.) "Chinese" should be read in the same syntax as today's "Asians." People in western countries believe in the massive existence of "Asians," but very few people in "Asia" share this curious idea.

23. This identification is not accidental. After the coup of March 1962, the Burmese military dictatorship effectively barred students from studying abroad. The war-torn countries of Indochina were burning up their youths on the battlefield. Indonesians were traumatized by the horrors of 1965–66. Malaysia, still Ukania-oriented in those days, sent few students to the US.

appearance of the steamship, and a vast labour-hungry market in capitalist-colonial Southeast Asia, made possible mass migrations of young males from different language groups on a completely unprecedented scale.²⁶ Third was the appearance at the end of the century of Chinese nationalisms, not only in urban China itself, but also, and sometimes even earlier, in the Nanyang.²⁷ In the zone of today's Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, in particular, these nationalisms accompanied an increase in literacy, in both Chinese and Roman orthographies, the arrival of the newspaper, and normalized sex ratios among the immigrants leading to more settled families. By contrast, in Siam and the Philippines, where, for different reasons, assimilation had proceeded rather rapidly and smoothly, the tendency was much less strong, and the identification with Siamese and Filipino nationalism much greater.

With the fall of the Ch'ing in 1911, and the unsteady emergence of a national Chinese republic, the question of nationality and citizenship for people in Southeast Asia who either identified themselves in some ways as Chinese and/or were regarded as such by local populations and colonial governments, began to become pressing. The question became even more urgent in the postcolonial era, for local, regional, and international reasons. Locally (at least in the capitalist states) the removal of the Europeans from political-economic control opened the way for a rapid increase in the economic power of burgeoning Chinese entrepreneurs, while at the same time exposing them more deeply to extortion by indigenous elites and to resentment on the part of the national masses.²⁸ Regionally, Chinese business

interests spread across national frontiers, as capitalists sought to diversify their risks and opportunities. At the same time, the rival Chinas, based in then left-wing Peking and right-wing Taipei, attempted, each in its own way, to win friends among local nation-state elites, local oppositions, and the émigré Chinese. There was, in due course, also the anomaly of the municipality of Singapore: formally multi-ethnic or multi-racial, but in effect a third Chinese national possibility,²⁹ under the interminable regime of Lee Kwan-yew and his henchmen.³⁰

In the postcolonial period, it was not unusual for those (typically outside observers) who believed in the singular reality of the Chinese, to view them as the unique and necessary transregional basis for a truly Southeast Asian economy in the making. As the Cold War in Asia abated, as electronic communications developed, and as the long boom of the 1970s and 1980s deepened, the belief that the Chinese would do for Southeast Asia economically what the diplomats of ASEAN were trying to do for it politically and strategically became more widespread. Whether this vision corresponds to reality is, however, rather doubtful. In the first place, the economies of the region's nation-states are (with the exception of Singapore) essentially competitive rather than complementary. It is a striking fact that in the pre-Crash era of the early 1990s, intraregional trade was still of minor significance. In 1992, for example, intra-ASEAN exports amounted to a mere 17.4 per cent of total exports.³¹ Even this 17.4 per cent is deceptive since goods going into the entrepôt of Singapore were substantially not for local consumption, but for transshipment outside the region.³² The figures for the Philippines (5.9 per

26. Mary Somers Heidhues offers a vivid synopsis of the variations. Hokkienese were dominant in the Philippines, Java, and the commercial enclaves of Malacca, Penang, Singapore, and Cholon-Saigon; Cantonese dominated in rural Malaya, and, until World War II, in Cambodia; Teochiu in Siam, Sumatra, and postwar Cambodia; Hakka in northern and western Borneo; while the late arriving Hainanese mostly settled in southern Vietnam and Siam. In Burma a substantial number of emigrants came overland from Yunnan. Density of settlement also varied greatly. Colonial Malaya lay at one extreme; on the eve of World War II, there were actually more "Chinese" in the peninsula than there were "Malays." By contrast, in the Netherlands Indies, Burma, and Laos, the "Chinese" percentage was probably never higher than 5. See her *Southeast Asia's Chinese Minorities* (Hawthorn, Victoria: Longmans Australia, 1974), pp. 2-6.

27. See Liren Zheng, "Overseas Chinese Nationalism in British Malaya, 1894-1941" (Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1997).

28. All three of the national languages of Southeast Asia with which I am familiar have derogatory words for "Chinese," but only Suharto's Indonesia has insisted on the official use of such a word. Hence the rather melancholy situation in which young people of Chinese origin describe themselves in advice columns and elsewhere as, using the English word, "Chinese." (*Saya seorang Chinese* [I am a Chinese], rather than the self-degrading *Saya seorang Cina* [I am a Chink].) While popular resentment of the Chinese is commonplace everywhere in the region, neither Siam nor the Philippines have experienced an anti-Chinese pogrom or race riot in this century; by contrast, there has been a continuing history of such violence in Indonesia from the onset of modern politics in the 1910s.

29. I experienced the poignancy of this conundrum when teaching a graduate class at Yale University in the autumn of 1996. Among the students was one, American-born, with a completely American style of speech, who insisted that he was "absolutely" Chinese. A second student, born to an elite Kuomintang mainland family, informed me that he considered himself Taiwanese and had come to Yale partly to learn to be fluent in Taiwanese. A third expressed his fury at constantly being picked out as Chinese in America. "I am not Chinese," he said, with the most determinedly winning of smiles. "I am Singaporean."

30. Lee first became Chief Minister in 1957, thanks to the support of the then powerful organized Left. Once in power, he collaborated with the British in trying to crush these allies. London's concern to keep Singapore out of left-wing hands, especially in view of the radical-talking Indonesian government next door, led it to dream up the idea of Malaysia, into which uncertain Singapore would be absorbed. Conservative Malay leaders, initially balking at the prospect of so many Chinese entering their polity, were persuaded to agree by having putatively "indigenous" Sabah and Sarawak turned over to them at the same time. The union lasted only two years (1963-65), mainly because Lee had ambitions greater than being a mayor. By that time he had achieved such absolute control of Singapore that he could decide to make the town a putative nation.

31. See Gerald Tan, *ASEAN: Economic Development and Cooperation* (Singapore: Times Academic Press, 1996), pp. 188-90.

32. Good "Singaporean" and "ASEAN-ist" that he is, Tan is careful not to mention this inconvenient matter.

cent), Siam (12.7 per cent), and Indonesia (11.6 per cent) are particularly unimpressive. The data on intra-ASEAN imports are virtually identical.³³ Nor, again with the exception of Singapore, were the countries of Southeast Asia investing substantially in one another's development. After the Crash, and with the rapidly increasing economic might of both China and Taiwan, it is quite likely that even these low percentages will diminish. Few observers have failed to notice that when hard times arrived, the ASEAN states and their capitalists could do little to help one another, and indeed tended to act on the ancient and sensible principle of *sauve qui peut*.

SOUTHEAST ASIA AS A POLITICAL BLOC?

It is a striking fact that when ASEAN was formed, in 1967, invitations to join it were issued to all the existing states in Southeast Asia (and to none outside it); these included not merely Singapore (which had only just become an independent state), but the two Vietnams, Cambodia, Laos, Burma, and even the oil sheikdom of Brunei (which only became officially independent of London seventeen years later). Although none of these latter invitations was then accepted, this invitation list, drawn up a few months away from the Tet offensive, was in principle a break with the conventions of the Cold War, and can be seen today as the first step towards creating a regional diplomatic bloc along the lines of the existing arrangements in Africa, the Americas, and Western Europe. The core idea was to create institutional arrangements for resolving intraregional quarrels without Great Power interventions, and for creating a joint "world presence" of which none of the countries on their own was capable.

The degree to which these objectives have actually been achieved is limited and equivocal. Confrontation came to an end not because of ASEAN but because General Suharto overthrew Sukarno, its architect. Marcos decided not to pursue Filipino claims to Sabah when he discovered that Malaysian politicians were capable of damaging retaliation by helping the Muslim (Bangsa Moro) secessionist rebellion that broke out in the southern Philippines in 1972 at the onset of his dictatorship. But the withdrawal of British troops from Southeast Asia at the end of the 1960s, and the collapse of the American position in Indochina in 1975, provided ASEAN with a more favourable environment for flexing its local muscles.³⁴ The focus, not surprisingly, was Indochina. Led principally by Siam, Malaysia, and

33. See Tan, *ASEAN*, p. 12.

34. This was really the only possibility. None of the member states had armed forces capable of interstate conventional warfare. In any case these forces were mostly busy oppressing their own nationals and propping up the existing authoritarian regimes.

Singapore, a vociferous campaign was launched to prevent ASEAN countries from being forced to take in the bulk of the refugees fleeing by boat and overland from the victorious communist governments in Hanoi, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh. Following the overwhelming success of the Vietnamese armies in Cambodia in 1978-79, ASEAN collaborated closely with Peking and Washington to prevent the Heng Samrin government created by Hanoi from assuming Cambodia's seat at the United Nations, and to provide support of various kinds for the forces of Pol Pot and other groups resisting the Vietnam-imposed *fait accompli*. In this way, during the late 1970s and 1980s, ASEAN functioned less as an anticommunist than as an anti-Vietnam bloc. This condition did not come to an end through ASEAN efforts, but rather because of the co-ordinated intervention of the major world powers through the United Nations, and because Hanoi had decided that its objectives in Cambodia had essentially been achieved.

ASEAN was also lame because of the authoritarian nature of most of its governments. Few of these regimes tolerated serious domestic criticism, and their co-operation from the start depended on the principle of "non-interference" in each other's self-defined affairs.³⁵ Hence ASEAN has been impotent to do anything substantial about the Bangsa Moro problem in the Philippines or Jakarta's self-defeating imperialism in East Timor. The recent inclusion of the dictatorships of Vietnam, Laos, and Burma within ASEAN is unlikely to diminish this impotence. ASEAN's humiliating ditherings over what to do about Hun Sen's Cambodia—to say nothing of Burma's and Vietnam's refusal to accept the quite recent ASEAN principle of visa-less movement of its peoples across national borders—simply confirm this impression. At the same time, it is clear that over the past decade ASEAN has more and more managed to have itself taken seriously in international diplomacy, and a generational change in the political leaderships of the region, long overdue, may open the way to democratization and less unprincipled coalitions.³⁶

35. It is perhaps worth offering a word or two about the only ideological formula proffered to justify this tactical principle: "Asian values." First, and most noticeably, they are—mercifully—not "Southeast Asian values." For good reason: the largely Christian Philippines got rid of its dictatorship in 1986; and monarchical Buddhist Siam has been "democratizing" by fits and starts since the end of the 1970s. Neither has shown any substantial interest in "Asian values." Nor, however, has inward-looking, deeply divided Indonesia, despite the decades-old Suharto dictatorship. The noise has come principally from the Singaporean dictatorship, and to a lesser extent from the permanent Malay government in Kuala Lumpur, each for its own reasons eager to justify its behaviour on non-religious grounds ("Asian" is meant above all, in a postcommunist age, to conceal/supersede religious differences) and to build profitable bridges with the "Confucian" world to the north and east.

36. As of present writing, the heads of state of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Siam, and Laos are in their seventies. "Elder statesman" Ne Win in Burma is even older. Curiously enough, only Cambodia has a young "strongman."

I came to study at Cornell University in January 1958 for the most superficial of reasons: curiosity. Indonesia was then on the front pages of the newspapers because it had a huge and legal communist party, and because a CIA-fostered civil war was on the verge of breaking out. It so happened that George Kahin, the scholar who had written *the* pathbreaking book about the modern politics of a country which, in those days, most Americans and Europeans would have had difficulty locating on a world map, was teaching at Cornell.³⁷ He was also, however, an enormously creative Executive Director of the United States's second Southeast Asia programme, who assembled a remarkable array of professorial talents around him, and sought energetically to recruit students interested in every one of the emerging Southeast Asian nation-states on the assumption that they had every reason to study together and learn from each other. (For me, it was therefore institutionally impossible to study Indonesia on its own; it could only be done in a regional context.) One last decisive aspect of Kahin's formative influence was his patriotism. Precisely because he wanted to be proud, not ashamed, of his country, his scholarly career was, indeed still is, shaped by his political activism. He had been deprived of a passport in the early 1950s for his sharp criticisms of American foreign policy. Later, as the American intervention in Indochina deepened, he would switch his main focus of concern there, rather than to his first love, Indonesia.³⁸ Looking back, it seems to me that Kahin was the logical-historical antithesis

37. This is the classic *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952). A striking feature of this book which, alas, disappeared in the writings of his students, was its assumption of Indonesia's utter modernity. It says nothing about "Java Man," ancient kingdoms and chronicles, even early colonialism. It assumes that Indonesia came into existence with its nationalist movement.

38. The centrality of Kahin in forming the best traditions of Southeast Asian studies cannot be understated. He had begun his Asian connections in the earliest days of the Pacific War when he had helped a Quaker campaign to compel the debtors of Japanese Americans interned on the West Coast to honour their obligations. He later joined the Army, and was trained in the Malay (Indonesian) language for eventual parachuting behind Japanese lines in Java or Sumatra. The military being what it was, he ended up actually serving in Italy. In 1948 he left, as a student at the Johns Hopkins University, to do fieldwork in Indonesia while the revolutionary war against the returning Dutch was going on. He became an intimate of many of the Indonesian leaders, and, on his return to the United States, actively lobbied in Washington for their cause. *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* exerted a powerful scholarly and ethical-political hold on my generation of Southeast Asianists. In the 1960s and 1970s he was the earliest and most prominent Southeast Asianist critic of American intervention in Indochina. Out of this engagement came *The United States in Vietnam* (New York: Bell, 1967), written in collaboration with John F. Lewis, and the masterly *Intervention: How America became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986). In the 1990s, he returned to the study of Indonesia, from which came *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (New York: New Press, 1995), written together with Audrey Kahin.

of the postwar American hegemonic project for Southeast Asia. His students learned from him the inseparability of politics and scholarship.

Indonesia was certainly a special place to study in the late 1950s and 1960s, by comparison with the other countries of Southeast Asia. Kahin had recruited the courtly linguist and lexicographer John Echols, who published the first good postcolonial dictionary of a national Southeast Asian language, and who by his teaching made young "Indonesianists" the first sizeable group of Southeast Asianists to be fluent in the national vernacular.³⁹ He had also recruited the Riga-born, Jewish-Russian dancer, archaeologist, and art historian Claire Holt, who had lived and studied in the Netherlands Indies for much of the 1930s, and returned to independent Indonesia in the 1950s to continue and extend her earlier work.⁴⁰ A few hours' car drive away at Yale was the Jewish-Czech historian Harry Benda, who had worked for an Austrian company in the Indies during the late 1930s and had been interned by the Japanese. Both these teachers brought students a sceptical European attitude towards the imperial aspects of American Southeast Asian studies, and both brought to students a vivid sense of the continuities and discontinuities between the colonial era and the era of independence. Finally, there was the accident—as he himself later recorded—that one of the most influential American anthropologists of the 1960s and 1970s, Clifford Geertz, did his most important fieldwork in Java and Bali.

Special in some ways Indonesia might be in those days, but it was always thought about and studied in a Southeast Asian frame. This frame was only reinforced by the experience of the Vietnam War years, which, to various extents, forced scholars and students studying very different countries and problems to take stands, for or against the war, as Southeast Asianists. And not merely for intellectual or political reasons. No matter what our particular scholarly research interests, we had grown up together, studied together, and read and criticized each other's work; in a certain way, we were chained together by a Southeast Asia to which, in one sense, we had helped give a certain reality.

Such were the institutional circumstances which made it possible for me, after being banned from Indonesia in April 1972, to think nothing of shifting over to the study of Siam (in 1974–75), and, a decade later, of moving on to the Philippines (though for a short time I seriously considered the unheard-of: venturing outside Southeast Asia, to Sri Lanka). Siam and the

39. Thai specialists followed soon after. But it was not until the 1980s that knowledge of Vietnamese, Burmese, and Filipino came to be regarded as *de rigueur* for specialists on these countries.

40. She had worked in the State Department during and after the war, till she resigned in protest against the ravages of McCarthyism.

most of my Indonesia-specialist colleagues circumspectly silent—of being denied access to the country as punishment for speaking out. Curiously enough, the experience of preparing testimony, and giving it, brought back the flavour of the Vietnam War era. It was as if the “enemy” had never changed—the same equivocal State Department spokesmen, the same deceitful ambassadors, the same Cold Warrior military and intelligence officers. From that time on, I came increasingly in touch with East Timorese patriots in exile overseas, and with a growing international network of supporters of the East Timorese cause. A recent outcome of this engagement is “Gravel in Jakarta’s Shoes,” which attempts to explain why after twenty years of occupation the Suharto regime has failed to turn East Timorese into Indonesians, why East Timorese nationalism is spread far more widely and deeply than it was at the moment of Jakarta’s invasion, more than twenty years ago, and what costs Indonesians have paid for their rulers’ savage folly.

I spent a year (1974–75) in Siam, studying its dominant language, reading about its history, and following its politics. It was a wonderful time to be there, because in October 1973 a massive popular and unarmed uprising in Bangkok had created the conditions for the collapse of the long-standing American-backed, -armed, and -financed military regime of Sarit Thanarat and his lieutenants Thanom Kittikajon and Praphat Jarusathien. In 1974 and most of 1975, Siam was an extraordinarily free and exhilarating place, full of student demonstrations, workers’ strikes, peasant mobilizations, and the sharpest political debates. In the spring of 1975 the country’s first-ever genuinely free election took place, and for the first—and last—time a substantial number of left-wing people were elected to parliament. A better contrast to Indonesia under Suharto could hardly be imagined. At almost the same moment as this election, however, the American position in Indochina abruptly crumbled to dust, creating panic in conservative circles in next-door Siam. The year 1976 was marked by an intensifying campaign of terroristic violence against people seen as on the Left, culminating in the coup of October 6, 1976, which was accompanied by gruesome murders of students in downtown Bangkok itself. In the wake of this violence hundreds of the most intelligent and dedicated left-wing youngsters fled to the maquis where they were initially welcomed by the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT).

“Withdrawal Symptoms” was written a few months after the coup and the murders, and was my first venture in publishing about Siam. Composed at a moment when nobody could have predicted that within two years Vietnam would successfully invade Cambodia, that China would unsuccessfully invade Vietnam, and that the three-cornered war would quickly lead to the collapse of the CPT, it read the domestic polarization of 1976–77 as the irreversible outcome of the Cold War and the domineering, transforming American

presence over the previous quarter of a century.⁴² Thus while the analysis of the October 6, 1976 coup and its background seem to me still correct, the predictions with which it ended soon proved illusory. “Murder and Progress in Modern Siam,” published more than ten years later, when a corrupt, conservative civilian regime seemed to have stabilized in the country after the elimination of any organized Left, is a sort of melancholy correction to “Withdrawal Symptoms,” as well as the beginning of some work on “bourgeois democracy” in Southeast Asia, a topic addressed more fully in the chapter “Elections in Southeast Asia.”

I had briefly visited the Philippines in early 1972, mainly to see friends, and had the presentiment that Ferdinand Marcos was close to proclaiming a dictatorship. This presentiment was confirmed by the arch-cacique’s declaration of martial law that September. I did not return to Manila until after February 1986, when the ill and ageing tyrant, along with his laughable wife and her gimerack valuables, were whisked off to Hawaii by the Americans. It was another good time—like Siam in 1974–75. A substantial number of my students poured into Cory Aquino’s Philippines, and I found myself swept along in their wake. From my adolescence I had always wanted to learn Spanish, and now there was a good reason to get started, for in the heroic era of modern Philippine history—the 1880s to the 1900s, when the country pioneered the rise of nationalism in Asia—virtually all the documents were written in that language. Using dictionaries, my residual French and Latin, and a dissembling crib—I taught myself the language in the most enjoyable way imaginable: by reading in the original José Rizal’s great incendiary novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. But it was not Rizal alone who caught my imagination—there was also the courage of the original insurrectionary, Andrés Bonifacio, the formidable intellect and exemplary character of Apolinario Mabini, architect of the Revolutionary Republic of 1898, the military genius of Antonio Luna, and the lucidity and organizing ability of Marcelo del Pilar. All were dead by 1903, when the Americans had largely consolidated their rule.⁴³ Living in Manila in 1988–89, watching the shaky

42. The entirety of the “American era”—beginning with American backing for the coup-makers of November 1947 and ending with the final withdrawal of American troops and the closing of American military installations in Siam in 1975–76—is considered through the lens of Thai literature in my *In the Mirror: Literature and Politics in Siam in the American Era* (Bangkok: Duang Kamon, 1985).

43. Rizal was executed by the Spanish at the very end of 1896. Del Pilar had died in poverty in Barcelona six months earlier. Bonifacio was murdered by followers of his usurper Emilio Aguinaldo in May 1897. Luna was also assassinated by Aguinaldo’s men—in June 1899. After the conquest, Mabini, who was paralysed from the waist down, refused to take the oath of allegiance to the new colonial regime, and was exiled to another recent American acquisition, the Spanish Marianas. He died of cholera in 1903, a few months after returning to Manila.

Aquino regime buffeted by repeated weird coup attempts by right-wing colonels,⁴⁴ it was impossible not to reflect on the question of why figures of comparable eminence had never again appeared, and why the colony of the most powerful of the capitalist states had become visibly the most immiserated of the independent countries of the region outside the communist bloc.

"Cacique Democracy" was written in 1988, not long before "Murder and Progress in Modern Siam," and it has the same tonality, although its schematic scope is the entire modern history of the Philippines. It was also the occasion for a more distanced reflection on American imperialism (whose effects I had run into earlier, in different ways, in Indonesia, Indochina, and Siam), since American domination in Manila had preceded the Cold War by almost half a century. Furthermore, Rizal and his comrades of the 1880s and 1890s were so extraordinarily unlike anyone I could think of in other parts of Southeast Asia, and indeed their "time" was so out of sync with Southeast Asian time, that it was necessary to consider them outside a standard Southeast Asian framing. One might think of the problem on the pivot of 1887—the year in which *Noli Me Tangere* was published in Berlin. Dr. Soetomo had not yet been born. Britain had completed its conquest of Burma only two years earlier, while the French initiated their Union of Indochina only as Rizal was finishing his manuscript. To the south, London's sovereignty over the Malay peninsula had been formalized only in 1874.

The obvious context for contemplating the late nineteenth-century Philippines was, first, the paradoxically creaky but enlightened Spanish Empire which had started to fall apart in South America three-quarters of a century earlier; and, from there, the larger comparative framework of mottled colonialism. "The First Filipino," written very recently, tries to situate Rizal in these contexts, while at the same time tampering with the hardening shell of Southeast Asian studies. It would have been impossible for me to have written it a decade earlier, though in principle the world-framing of *Imagined Communities*, and especially the chapter on creole pioneers, should have prodded my thinking in this direction. "Hard to Imagine," drafted in the early 1990s, considers the strange fate of *Noli Me Tangere* in the age of official nationalism and postindependence cacique democracy.

44. Here I cannot resist an exemplary anecdote. At the height of the last and most serious of these attempted coups, I found myself seeking safety from likely tank and helicopter fire by crouching along the wall of the capital's Mormon Tabernacle. Next to me was a rebel junior officer shouting imprecations at the Americans, whom he understood to be helping the Aquino regime. My fear that his anger would be vented on me as a probable American was only allayed when the officer fixed on a fellow croucher—a large and corpulent man with two cameras, who announced himself nervously as a German. To my complete astonishment, the young rebel gave the stout fellow a Heil Hitler salute and enquired eagerly about the health of Field Marshal Rommel. This was a perfect moment to slink further away behind the sheltering Tabernacle.

The group of essays that follow are, as mentioned above, attempts to make formal comparisons within the frame of Southeast Asia. The first two, written in the early 1990s, are, though very different in style, closely connected. "Elections in Southeast Asia" considers the paradoxical character of "free elections" as they cropped up in the Cold War and post-Cold War trajectories of Siam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. At the spectral extremes: why dozens of "free elections" have made little difference to the misery of the Philippines, while the absence of "free elections" has been catastrophic for Indonesia. "Radicalism after Communism" compares the contrasting fates of the communist movements in Siam and Indonesia, and the residues of refusal left behind for what was, in those now distant days, dubbed the end of history. It was also an occasion to pay personal tribute to a few Siamese and Indonesians who commanded my unstinting admiration. Today, in the midst of the collapse of the Asian bubble economies, its tone may seem unduly melancholy.

"Sauve Qui Peut" was forced on me by the accident of this book's date of publication—more or less a year after this financial collapse. So unexpected was this collapse, so painful its immediate local effects, and so uncertain its longer-term consequences for the world economy, that it could not reasonably be ignored in a book with the subtitle "Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World." Rather than focusing on the immediate causes of the crisis, which are now well known, I have tried to ask these less often posed questions. What were the conditions of possibility for the (Southeast) Asian "miracle" of the last twenty-five years? How far have these conditions now disappeared? What connections can reasonably be claimed between the variable severity of financial collapse and the character of the political regimes in contemporary Southeast Asia? It is no more than a preliminary sketch, however, for which I ask the reader's indulgence.

"Majorities and Minorities" arose out of a 1987 meeting, mainly of anthropologists, arranged by David Maybury-Lewis's Cultural Survival organization, to consider together the fates and prospects of "tribal minorities" trapped and variously oppressed in the postcolonial nation-states of Southeast Asia. The sessions in Cambridge, Massachusetts, were salutary for me in two ways. First of all, they forced me, by the sheer wealth and variety of the grim material at hand, to look for a useful, steady frame in which their juxtaposition could be made intelligible. I found this frame through reflection on the means through which the very idea of "minorities" had come into being, and then been materialized in Southeast Asia: to wit, through the transfer into the colonial world, from the end of the nineteenth century, of the metropolitan institution of the census, the administrative practices that were built around the census, and the "scientific" anthropology

whose truth was mortgaged to it. From that time on, my theoretical interest in censuses as narratives of power developed steadily, leading a few years later to one major addition to the original *Imagined Communities*—the chapter entitled “Census, Map, Museum.” Second, my long attachment to, and interest in, anticolonial nationalism had occluded from my vision its menacing potentialities once it got married to the state. A new recognition of this menace was the start of a process which has, more than a decade later, led to the essay in this volume (chapter 16) devoted to Mario Vargas Llosa’s *El Hablador*—an extraordinary, aporetic, nationalist novel about modern Peru and its Amazonian “tribal minorities.” Picked up originally for a casual read, it worked on me like a madeleine, bringing back, powerfully and unexpectedly, remembrances of Southeast Asia’s past.

The fore-and-aft framing studies consist initially of three “theoretical” essays which try to probe more deeply than I had managed hitherto into the origin, nature, and prospects of nationalism in general. They had their messy origins in the Carpenter Lectures which I was invited to give at the University of Chicago in April 1993. They consider in turn the underlying grammar of nationalism, the peculiarity of nationalist images as replicas without originals, and the growing disjunction between nation-states and national identity as a consequence of contemporary mass migrations and revolutions in communications and transportation. In each case, I started out with the big end of my telescope in “Southeast Asia”: the sugar belt of colonial Java, the monument to Rizal in downtown contemporary Manila, and the airport in Bangkok, where frail migrants set off every day to all quarters of their unseen employers’ world.

At the end of the book come the reflections on the implications of Vargas Llosa’s *El Hablador*, mentioned above, and “The Goodness of Nations,” which briefly considers why it is both possible and necessary, against, one might say, the evidence, to think well of nationalism around the time of its two-hundredth birthday.

PART I

THE LONG ARC OF NATIONALISM